Siege At Beslan
Lessons for America

Michael Fox
Dispatch Supervisor, TLO
San Bernardino Police Department
Your Instructor

- 30 Years as a Public Safety Dispatcher
- 21 years with San Bernardino Police Department.
- Terrorism Awareness, WMD Trainer
- TLO
- Member San Bernardino/Riverside County TEWG
Denial Leads to disaster

- It can happen here!
- They have warned us it will happen.
- You, the dispatcher make a difference in the outcome.
- When it happens in your jurisdiction, the first moments will determine the outcome.
- Be mentally and physically prepared to handle the situation.
- Tactical Breathing
Introduction

- 9/1/2004
- First Day of School
- Festive time in Russia
- Main School yard is crowded with students and parents.
The Attack

- The terrorists arrive in vehicles that would not arouse suspicion.
- Police Vehicles
- Military Vehicles
- The terrorists had floor plans for the school.
- Some terrorists were “embedded” in the crowd outside the school.
The Attack

- The terrorists were well armed
  - AK47s, sniper rifles, RPGs, and explosives.
- The operation was well planned
- Had “reconned” the school earlier
  - Via physical recon
  - Via Internet
  - Via Informants
The Attack

- The Terrorists chose the school for their ability to defend it.
- Large open fields of fire
- Thick masonry walls
- Small windows
- Taller building
- Complicated floor plan
Executing the Plan

- Children and adults taken to the gym
- Male teacher executed in front of the hostages.
- Bombs planted
- Adult males and older boys conscripted to place book cases, desks, etc. in front of doors and windows.
The Gym
The terrorists were ruthless

- Men and older boys were executed after setting barricades
- Victims were thrown out a second story window to intimidate local police.
- Women and older girls were taken to another room and raped.
- All of this prevented the chance of revolt among those in the gym.
- Hostages were deprived of food and water.
  - Forced to drink urine out of shoes
  - Forced to eat the flowers they had brought to celebrate
Bombs planted and defense set

- Terrorist claimed they had bombs wired to a foot switch.
The Russian Response

- At first only local militia on scene
- Firing AK47’s at random into the building.
- Poor crowd control
- Russian soldiers stood bye and waited for orders.
- Russian Special Forces (Spetznatz) arrive on the second day (Vymple and Alpha)
Russian Spetznatz Deploys
Barricaded

- The hostage situation lased 3 days
- Negotiations were a delaying tactic to allow the media to show up.
- Hostage takers kept asking for Chechen political prisoners to be released.
The Siege Ends

- An Explosion occurs somewhere in the gym
- Russian Spetnatz storms the school
- Had to use an inert tank round to breach the walls.
- During the fire fight tens of thousands of rounds are fired.
The Siege Ends

- Russian Troops are forced to storm barricade after barricade.
- Fighting is brutal and inside enclosed spaces.
- At one point, children who were rescued were so thirsty they stopped for a drink at a water fountain and were grenaded.
Final Toll

- 362 Hostages and Russian Troops died
- 700 Hostages and Russian Troops Injured
- Psychological toll on the town of Beslan was immense.
Lessons Learned

- The Terrorists will gather all intelligence available on their intended target(s).
  - Video
  - Photographic
  - Internet
  - Interview with employees
  - Interviews with neighbors
Lessons Learned

- Terrorists will arrive in vehicles that will not arouse suspicion.
- Terrorists will blend in with local culture.
- Terrorists are risk-averse and will avoid “hard targets”.

[Image of a building]
Lessons

- Terrorists look for high profile targets
- Terrorists want extensive media coverage
- In countries that have a Muslim Insurgency, schools and churches are typically the first targets hit.
- Prevention is the key
- Report suspicious activity
- Communicate
- During the siege at Beslan, at least four agencies claimed to be in charge. Actually no one was in charge and no one wanted to be.
Why Schools?

- **Our values**
  - “The most sacred thing to us is our children, our babies.” Todd Rassa, SigArms Academy
  - It would be an attempt to “…defile our nation by leaving it stunned to its soul.” Lt. Col. Dave Grossman.

- **Our lack of preparation**
  - Beslan was not a criminal act, it was an act of war.
  - American police, not military will respond to a school attack.
  - Schools are not prepared for such an attack
Deny

- Engage the assailant(s) as far out as possible. Parking Lot, Street, Etc.
- Use barricades and fences to prevent suspect access.
- Schools and other potential targets should conduct lockdown drills. Be sure to ask them if they have.
- Good communication. PA announcement? E-mail?
Deter

- Is there a School Resource officer on site?
- Is there visible Security on site?
- Is there an evacuation plan?
- Lockdown Plan?
- Rallying points?
- Make sure the rallying points are safe.
- Police vehicle visible on site?
“The ultimate achievement is a terrorist attack that doesn’t start.” Lt. Col. Dave Grossman

- Ask probing questions
- Be alert for contradictions, inconsistencies, irrationalities.
- Is your caller (contact) irrationally nervous?
- Don’t “kiss off” that suspicious circumstances or suspicious subject call.
Detect

- Watch for signs of static or mobile surveillance of potential targets.
- Inform schools or potential targets to report any calls from people inquiring about security.
  - Have them jot down caller id for follow-up
- Don’t limit your suspicions just to persons who fit the stereotypical terrorist profile.
Delay

- Buy time for the reinforcements to arrive
- Provide barriers for the suspects
- What is your department's current policy to engage an active shooter?
- Three step lockdown drill
  - Move away from the violence
  - Move to a pre-selected secure location
  - Move again if you feel threatened at that spot
As a dispatcher you must be mentally prepared for the deadly encounter that will take place.

Remember, you have sent an officer who is mentally and physically prepared to use deadly force to stop the threat.

“Fight from the very beginning. Don’t wait, thinking you will fight later. Every minute the Russians waited, the target got harder.” Lt. Col Dave Grossman.
Remember This

- If not me, then who?
- If not now, then when?
- Complacency is not an option
- Denial leads to disaster
- “What we have done in Russia, we will do a million fold in America” Osama Bin Laden
Questions

“We sleep safely at night because rough men stand ready to do harm to those who wish to destroy us.” H.G. Wells

“Americans must be prepared so they do not have to suffer the pain of the loss their children and the pain of having to survive them.” Russian Spetznatz Commander.
“Colonel, we are going to Afghanistan and we are going to kick the terrorists ass! When you do your training with the cops tell them to watch our six. Don’t let them kill our kids!”

Special Forces operator to Lt. Col. Dave Grossman upon deployment to Enduring Freedom.